

Just over 40 years ago, a police raid on a gay bar in Greenwich Village made history. The so-called Stonewall Riots, during which members of the gay community openly challenged institutionalized homophobia, marked the beginning of the modern Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights movement and led to the formation of gay rights organizations across the United States and around the world. Each June, we commemorate this ongoing struggle for equality by celebrating LGBT Pride Month.

It is indeed a historic time for our nation and the American people. What should have happened 17 years ago is now closer to being a reality than ever before. By passing the Murphy Amendment along with the Defense Authorization bill, the House of Representatives has pledged to fulfill its promise of upholding the values for which the United States stands by allowing gay and lesbian Americans to serve openly in the military. As I have said time and again, the discriminatory law known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” should be repealed once and for all. It threatens our national security and costs us millions of dollars each year to kick out dedicated and highly-skilled service members and to retrain new ones.

As we celebrate this victory, we are reminded of the long battle that has brought us to this point. I would be terribly remiss if I did not acknowledge the hard work and sacrifices of the countless service members and veterans, many of whose lives have been negatively impacted by this bigoted policy, as well as those military and policy leaders, advocacy organizations, and everyday Americans who have taken a stand against discrimination.

I am also pleased that President Obama and his administration have taken meaningful steps toward achieving LGBT equality. Most recently, President Obama extended a wider range of benefits to the same-sex partners of federal employees, including key protections such as long-term care insurance, health insurance reimbursements, business travel accident insurance, and tax reimbursements for homeowner’s insurance. In April, President Obama also mandated that all hospitals extend visitation rights to the partners of gay men and lesbians and that they respect patients’ choices about who may make critical health care decisions for them.

More than ever before, the fight for LGBT equality is full of hope and promise. But, our work is far from over. The sad reality is that gay and lesbian Americans are still essentially second-class citizens, with different rights depending on where they work and the state that they live in. This nation can only truly prosper when all of its citizens are guaranteed equal protection under the law. Laws that deprive LGBT Americans of these rights are unconstitutional, discriminatory, and unconscionable. It is my sincere hope that Congress and

our nation as a whole will work together to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), repeal the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), and lift the ban on men who have sex with men (MSM) donating blood.

The LGBT community is part of our American family. They are our friends and neighbors, and all contribute to this great nation. We must ensure that the pages of history only continue to turn forward on equality for all Americans, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This LGBT Pride Month, I reaffirm my resolve to achieve equal rights for LGBT Americans and nothing less. It is the right thing to do.